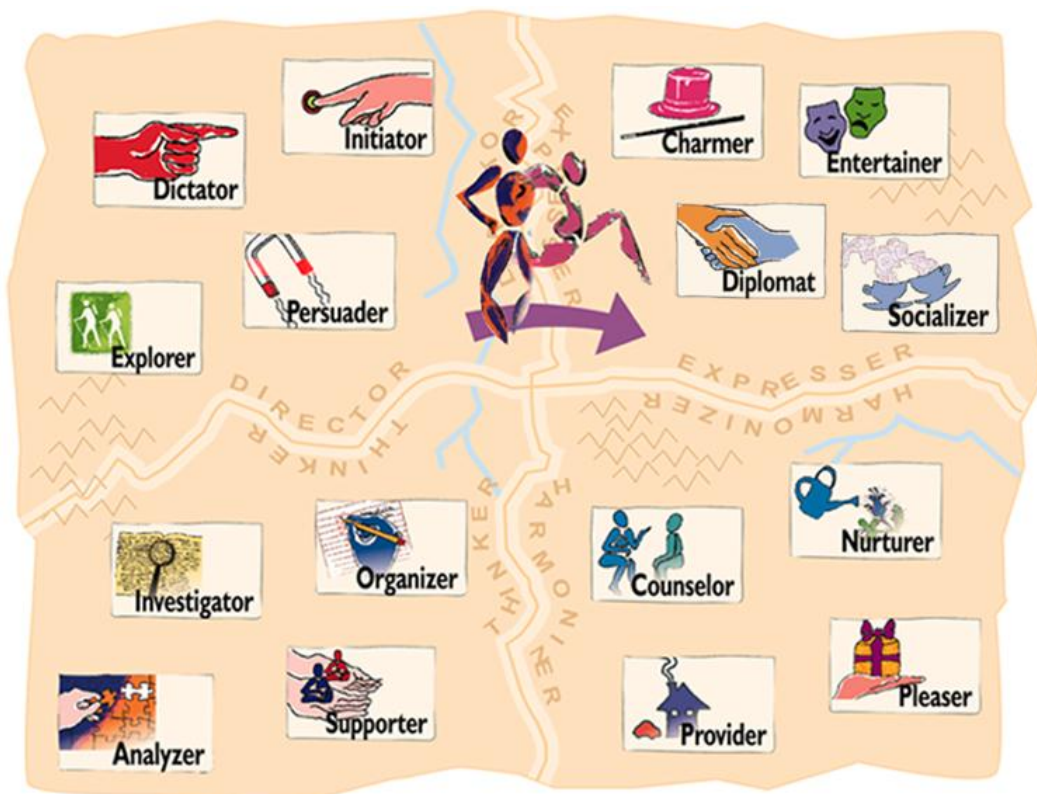


RESOLVING CONFLICTS AMONG STYLES

The four styles see the world differently. They tackle problems differently, they present information differently, they think differently. This leads inevitably to problems in communication.

There are two ways to flex your communication style to improve your communication with others. "Stepping Out" is the first strategy. It's tailored to a specific individual. It signifies a conscious shift from one style to another – for example, from the style of a Director toward that of an Expresser.

Again, look at the Matrix of Communication Styles as a map. The Director is in one place, and the Expresser is in another. The Director has to go outside of his or her turf to communicate in a way that reaches the Expresser, just as he or she would adopt a different set of behaviors in a foreign country.



Example: Suppose you are a Thinker and you want to invite a colleague to join a volunteer organization to which you belong. Your colleague is a Harmonizer. Rather than communicate like a Thinker, try to communicate like a Harmonizer. Instead of talking about what the group has accomplished, how often you meet, and what is usually on the agenda – you might instead talk about how many great people are in the club, how much fun you usually have at club meetings, and what a great sense of teamwork pervades the organization.

The second strategy for improving your communication style is to work on becoming a well-rounded communicator. This strategy is not tailored to another individual. Instead, you're working on yourself.

The first step is to identify your area of greatest growth potential. Everybody has one! Your lowest score on the Straight Talk[®] survey indicates the style you most need to work on.

Focusing on the area where you are weak allows you to grow within and become a more well-rounded communicator. It's a long-term approach that yields tremendous results as you learn to bend and flex and improve as a communicator on a more permanent level.



Example: If your growth potential lies in communicating more like a Thinker, then you would practice becoming more analytical and detailed in your approach, making lists of things to do, asking more detailed questions, burrowing down into a detailed understanding of how something works.

Jodie Foster, star of many films including the Academy Award winning film "The Silence of the Lambs," expressed in an interview that she was not necessarily a brave or strong person in real life, but that she chose parts that showed bravery in order to improve herself in that area. Likewise, you can work to strengthen whatever weaknesses you have in your communication style.

Straight Talk[®] with a Colleague

Step 1:

Note below the names of the people with whom you work most frequently. Write what you believe their styles to be. If you can't guess their individual style, try to guess their primary style.

Step 2:

Comparing the style of these people to your own style, predict with whom you're most likely to have style conflicts.

Step 3:

Work out some ground rules you could use in communicating with the people on your list with whom you have style conflicts.

| Name | Style | Probability of Style Conflict (high, medium, low) | Ground Rules |
|------|-------|--|--------------|
| 1. | | | |
| 2. | | | |
| 3. | | | |
| 4. | | | |
| 5. | | | |

Example: One person on your list is an Initiator (a Director/Expresser). He likes to take charge, make quick decisions, and he tends to keep feelings to himself. You've seen him jump to conclusions, make snap judgments about people, and forget to take into account others' opinions or feelings.

On the other hand, you are a Supporter (a Thinker/Harmonizer). You are patient, cautious and caring. You also have difficulty expressing yourself and tend to avoid dealing with conflicts between people.

Your communication with the Initiator leaves you baffled and intimidated. You don't understand how he can move so quickly. He seems not to care that people get trampled by his style.

The Initiator finds your style infuriating, as you seem slow, cautious and unable to address sensitive issues. He thinks you spend too much time worrying about people and not enough time doing your job.

As far as ground rules go, you'd like the Initiator to spend part of each conversation asking you what you think. You'd like him to be patient while you explain your ideas and concerns. From your side, you agree to respect the Initiator's style and to make your points clearly and succinctly. You agree to address conflicts that affect the organization at the first opportunity.

So the ground rules might look like this:

Initiator: Ask for the Supporter's point of view before making a decision.

Supporter: Present your points clearly and succinctly. Address conflicts early on.

Both: Agree to express your concerns directly to each other. Agree to acknowledge openly and frequently your appreciation for each other's style.

Managing Conflict

When faced with a conflict, different styles try to manage it in different ways. The following chart shows how each style approaches conflict and responds to it, both in positive and negative ways.

| Style | Approach | Positive Response | Typical Intent under conflict | Negative Response |
|-------------------|---|---|-------------------------------|--|
| Director | Not adverse to conflict; often the trigger. | Looks at the big picture and searches for common ground; if presented with evidence, will negotiate quick settlement. | Controlling | Jumps to conclusions, becomes dictatorial, autocratic; undermines other people, attacks their authority. |
| Expresser | Not adverse to conflict; sometimes the trigger. | Expresses his desire to solve the problem; begins searching for creative solutions. | Controlling or Defending | Jumps to conclusions, criticizes other people's behavior and attitudes; attacks people personally, raises his voice. |
| Thinker | Avoids conflict; normally not the trigger. | Analyzes causes and looks for missing data; studies implications of various solutions. | Defending or Relinquishing | Resents conflict; slows down productivity; avoids dealing with the conflict. |
| Harmonizer | Avoids conflict; rarely the trigger. | Inquires into other people's feelings and needs; seeks to understand what is best for the group. | Relinquishing | Acquiesces too quickly; withdraws; seeks relief by escape, avoidance. |

When conflict occurs, our initial intent is to control, relinquish or defend, rather than to affirm. It is more difficult in an emotionally charged situation to disclose our own feelings in a productive way and to ask other people to express their feelings. Yet an affirming intent is the ideal mode to use when conflict occurs. Why? It allows each party to communicate his or her point of view and thereby gain buy-in to resolving the conflict.

You might ask, "Why shouldn't I try to persuade or defend? After all, I believe my point of view is correct."

The answer: If your initial intent in a highly charged situation is to persuade or to coerce, no one will be persuaded, although they may comply. A leader desires

quality communication and relationships. Start by listening, then respond in an affirming mode. It's better to hear the other points of view than express your own. You will be in a better position to persuade others because they will have felt affirmed and validated.

Example: A co-worker storms into your office, slams the door and says, "That's the last time you're doing an end-run around me. Stay the hell out of my business!"

Defending Response: "You have no right to talk like that to me in my office."

Controlling Response: "I want you to sit down and tell me what this is all about."

Affirming Response: "I value our relationship. Could you sit with me and tell me what this is all about?"